

“When the tomb finds us”

- It has always seemed a paradox to me to call today Good Friday
 - Because there is just so much about it that is not good at all
 - Certainly Good Friday is a necessary precursor to the good of Easter,
 - But it is decidedly a bad day, and certainly the disciples would have thought so
 - It is a day of death. Of cruel death.
 - I am not sure how it got its name:
 - In Greek Christianity it is called “The Holy and Great Friday”¹
 - In the Romance languages, “Holy Friday”
 - In German “Sorrowful Friday”
 - But in English? “Good.”
 - Maybe somewhere along the way English speaking people misheard the German for “God’s Friday”
 - We don’t know- the history is ambiguous, and the name paradoxical
 - It is this day that we are asked to bear witness every year to when the disciples lost everything, had everything taken from them.
 - Everything Jesus was, everything he stood for, everything he taught, was killed and buried in that tomb
 - Cut short- taken from them too soon
 - For if the powers that be, that is the Roman army with its military might...
 - And the temple authorities protecting their own self interest
 - If they have the ability to stop Jesus, then what does that say about God?
 - What does that say about God’s ability to reach us, to save us... where is our hope?
 - It is not a good and pleasant thing to consider
 - I think the tradition in the church tries to reflect this reality just a bit- this moment in time when so much is at stake and in the balance
 - If Good Friday were the final chapter, then there would be no sacraments.

¹ Crossan and Borg, *Last Week*, chapter 6 Friday, Kindle Location 2092/3364

- Perhaps that is the reason we do not bless bread and wine on this day
- Instead we serve yesterday's consecrated bread and wine
 - Little memories of Grace from last night when Jesus was still alive
 - When he gave the disciples the new commandments to love one another, serve one another,
 - And told them to remember him when they ate and drank together
- We also traditionally do not have funerals today
 - Because they are Easter liturgies, and if Good Friday is all that there is, then there are no Easter liturgies to follow
- The altar is even bare, because there is no cause for decoration or celebration
- We even consume or burn all blessed elements and oils annually this week, and for us today
- The church is literally emptied of sacred, blessed things
- It helps us to understand, I think, what the disciples were feeling with the complete loss of hope.
 - A God that did not prevail after all
- You and I know Easter is coming- we have done this every year for many centuries
- But the disciples were going through this for the first time
- How could it be that God had forsaken Jesus so utterly?
- How could it be that God had let the oppressive Romans and Jewish establishment win and kill the Messiah?
- How could it be that their hopes were kindled, and then extinguished so quickly
- You may be wondering- I am sure the disciples were wondering- how did it come to this?
 - Honestly, it is not that hard to see how Jesus ended up on that cross
 - It is not hard to connect the dots of cause and effect here
 - Simply put, Jesus was perceived as a threat, the religious authorities in bed with Rome have all been plotting to take him out for some time now
 - Ever since he entered Jerusalem with palm branches and shouts of Hosanna... and turned over the money changing tables
 - By virtue of Jesus not ceasing his teaching, by virtue of Jesus continuing toward Jerusalem with his message of God's love for everyone
 - Especially the unloveable, the sinful, the unrighteous, the unwanted

- With his constant critique, and rightfully so, of the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the government
- Jesus has undermined, or started to erode, their positions of power and wealth, and respect.
- Branding Jesus a criminal and having him executed was a simple, if unethical, plan to just get rid of him.
- And Jesus, insisting on doing God's work, insisting on being God's incarnate presence in this world, would not stop- never gave up
- And so they arrested him, beat him, convicted him, and sentenced him to death
- God, in the flesh, so determined to call us back to covenant, to relationship, that even the threat of death did not deter Jesus
- But now what?
- It is so very tempting to skip today and to just stay home and not think about it
 - After all, we know that Jesus does not stay in this tomb
 - And that soon we will be celebrating once again with incense, brass, and chocolate fondue
 - And also, it's tempting to skip today because it is not easy to be reminded of the cross.
 - It represents the absolute worst in humanity, in us, in me.
 - How humanity can be so cruel and will sometimes do everything in its power to prevent goodness and hope from prevailing
 - To maintain the status quo even when it means killing an innocent man
 - While you and I were not there that day when they crucified our Lord, we could have been
 - We could have been cheering Hosannah earlier in the week
 - We too could have abandoned him, we too could have hid
 - And we too could have shouted "crucify him".
 - Yet here we are, facing headlong into what was one of the worst days on earth
 - When God's power, perseverance, and long-suffering love for us was put to the test.
 - But you must go through Good Friday in order to get to Easter.
 - You must go through death to get to resurrection.
 - We are here because today we see the worst, and tomorrow night we see God overcome it
 - Knowing that through this darkness does come light

- Through the sin comes forgiveness and reconciliation
- Through death God brings hope and resurrection
- God can do the impossible-
- God can take the vicious cross- a symbol of death, despair, and oppression, and turn it into one of hope and salvation
- That not even death, the final and ultimate separation, cannot stop God's love and keep us away from God.
- Perhaps the only good part of today is that it teaches us about tombs
 - Because let's be honest: sometimes tombs also find us, don't they?
 - There are times in our lives where we find ourselves much like the disciples- unable to see hope in the darkness
 - Where once we found meaning, happiness, and fullness, now we find emptiness and blackness
 - Sometimes, like it did so many years ago, it seems like hope has lost, and despair has won
 - Death is final.
 - God is missing in action
 - But we know about tombs.
- So what happens when the tombs find us?
 - When our lives are devastated with bad news: loss of job, loss of health, death of a loved one
 - What happens when THE tomb, our final tomb, finds us, and this mortal body lies in death, as our prayer book says?
 - We know what happens then, because of days like this Good Friday, when we get to see exactly how God handles tombs
 - And thanks to this tomb on this Good Friday, when our tombs do come, we have already been through them before with the disciples and Jesus
 - Good Friday exists to remind us that even at the darkest points in our lives when everything we love and value seems threatened or gone
 - God is able to over come it, because God was already able to overcome the worst of things and proved that there is always hope.
 - Darkness, grief, and hopelessness are only temporary
 - The dark of those tombs is the very canvas on which God is planning and painting a new hope, a new beginning...
 - A resurrection.
 - God cannot wait to show us what happens when the tombs find us... just give it another day or so. And you'll see.

Amen.